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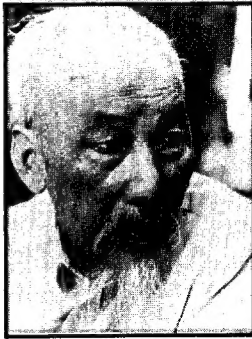
**CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
MEMORANDUM****SUMMARY**

A political tug of war has been under way for many years in Hanoi between party leaders who favor an extreme, aggressive approach to foreign and domestic policy and those inclined to greater caution and conservatism. The interplay between the militants and moderates has been of considerable importance in determining the general direction of DRV policy. It has, however, never reached a level which threatened the over-all stability of the regime.

The militant leaders, led by party First Secretary Le Duan, appear to have been the prime movers in Hanoi's decision to launch an all-out armed insurgency in South Vietnam. They also took the lead in 1963 in gaining North Vietnamese endorsement of many Chinese Communist positions in the Sino-Soviet dispute.

Hanoi's political swing toward Peking was strongly influenced by Khrushchev's failure to give the DRV the political and propaganda support it desired on the Vietnam war. Faced, however, with the threat of direct American military action against North Vietnam, Hanoi responded warmly to Moscow's new overtures of support following Khrushchev's ouster. Premier Pham Van Dong, long considered the top spokesman of the moderates, took the lead in the normalization of relations with the Soviets. Hanoi is now attempting to walk a careful middle line between Peking and Moscow, a switch in position which clearly has strengthened the influence of moderate elements in the party.

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1. Ho Chi Minh  
(Party Chairman)

# POLITICAL BUREAU OF THE NORTH VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST PARTY

*Moderate*



*Militant*



*Neutral*

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2. Le Duan  
(Party 1st Secretary)



3. Truong Chinh



4. Pham Van Dong



5. Pham Hung



6. Vo Nguyen Giap



7. Le Duc Tho



8. Nguyen Chi Thanh



9. Nguyen Duy Trinh



10. Le Thanh Nghi



11. Hoang Van Hoan



12. Tran Quoc Hoan  
(Alternate member)



13. Tran Tien Dung  
(Alternate member)

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It is not yet clear whether the renewed influence of the moderates will significantly affect the course of DRV foreign and domestic policy. With regard to the insurgency in the South, it appears that the moderates are willing to conduct a carefully measured escalation of the fighting to counter the buildup in US combat strength in Vietnam, but are more worried over the safety of North Vietnam. Although they have offered no terms acceptable to the US, the moderates have taken the lead among DRV party leaders in talking about the possibility of an eventual negotiated settlement of the conflict. This in itself is a considerable step away from the Chinese Communist position that there should be no talks on any terms, and that the war must be carried through to a complete Communist military victory.

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THE MILITANT AND MODERATE ELEMENTS  
IN THE NORTH VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST PARTY

Party Stability

1. The North Vietnamese Communist Party leadership has been remarkably stable. There have been no major purges in the party's 35-year history, and a firm facade of unity has always been maintained. Beneath the surface, however, a political tug of war has been carried on between elements favoring a more or less full-throttle approach to foreign and domestic policy and those inclined to greater caution and moderation. The interplay between these two groups --which have been dubbed in the West the "militant" and "moderate" factions--has been of considerable importance in determining the general direction of DRV policy. Despite the regime's efforts to conceal differences among the leadership, hints of their differing attitudes have appeared in their published articles and speeches.

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2. The disputation between these two groups has never reached an intensity which threatened the stability of the regime, largely because Ho Chi Minh, who has ruled the party with an iron hand since it was founded, has refused to identify himself with any particular political alignment. For example, he has remained personally neutral on the Sino-Soviet dispute. Exploiting his immense personal popularity, and carefully balancing one group against the other, he has managed to avoid exclusive dependence upon any one faction. Ho has in part been able to sustain his position because of the frequent line-crossing on specific issues by individuals in both camps. As a result, the political alignments in the DRV have not been hard and fast e.g., Truong Chinh, who had been associated with some of the more militant policies of the Hanoi regime in the 1954-1957 period, has recently been taking a more neutral stand on key policies.

The Militant Group

3. The militant group in the leadership has long taken its cue from the man theoretically in the

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best position to succeed Ho, party First Secretary Le Duan. His post provides a good spot from which to pack the central committee with his own followers. There is some evidence that he has already managed to stack the secretariat, the executive office of the central committee. He also appears to have his own men in the vital propaganda and training department of the party. These men in turn control the major party organs, the Hanoi daily Nhan Dan and the theoretical journal, Hoc Tap.

4. Other prominent politburo members of the militant group are the chief of the party organization department, Le Duc Tho, the former top army commissar, Nguyen Chi Thanh, and the former ambassador to China, Hoang Van Hoan. For the most part, these men have been inclined to view problems in Vietnam almost exclusively from an ideological standpoint and have played down the physical realities in any given situation. Their speeches and pronouncements are almost always strongly doctrinaire, placing heavy emphasis, for example, on the efficacy of "revolutionary spirit" in the solution of regime difficulties.

5. Some of the militants have argued strongly in the past for the adoption of certain extremist policies espoused by the Chinese Communists. While several of this group seem to have a personal affinity for the Chinese, others seem simply to value the aggressiveness of Peking's policies, many of which tend to coincide with what the militants believe best for the DRV. Vietnamese national interests, and not blind subservience to foreign Communist dogma or policy, has always been paramount in the actions of both militants and moderates. When the Hanoi regime came to power, for example, the militants pressed successfully for the adoption of the harsh Chinese Communist land reform programs. On the other hand, the extremist Chinese views which produced the "Great Leap" fiasco in 1958 were never seriously promoted in the DRV.

#### The Moderate Group

6. The leading spokesman for the moderates, and another strong possibility as successor to Ho Chi Minh, is Premier Pham Van Dong. He is ranked

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number four in the Politburo and controls the operation of the national government. Dong tries to present himself publicly as the epitome of Vietnamese nationalism. As such he does not openly enter into debates on party policy but seeks instead to keep himself, much as Ho does, above disputes. Within the party councils, however, he undoubtedly takes a vigorous part in debating policy.

7. It was Dong who was the primary architect of Hanoi's 1954-1959 policy of primary reliance on political methods to take over control in South Vietnam. He was both premier and foreign minister in those days and was Hanoi's chief delegate in negotiating the 1954 Geneva agreement.

8. Pham Van Dong's strongest supporters within the Politburo appear to be Pham Hung and Le Thanh Nghi. He probably also draws some support from the Defense Minister Vo Nguyen Giap--who next to Ho has the greatest stature with the DRV public--and from Giap's chief of staff Van Tien Dung, an alternate member of the Politburo.

9. Pham Hung ranks just below Pham Van Dong on the Politburo and as deputy premier acts in Dong's stead when the premier is out of Hanoi. Hung is a southerner by birth and is a relative newcomer to the top North Vietnamese hierarchy.

10. Hung has concentrated his energies largely in the field of government management. He is chief of the Finance and Commerce Board under the Premier's office and is the number two man on the important Party Secretariat, ranking just below Le Duan. His appointment to this post may have been intended to counterbalance Duan and his men. Like Pham Van Dong, Pham Hung generally avoids publicly identifying himself with issues in dispute.

11. Politburo member Le Thanh Nghi has never identified himself with any of the more extreme policies of the Le Duan group. His competence lies almost exclusively in the field of economic planning. He is chairman of the Industrial Board under the Premier's Office and appears to have primary responsibility in the Politburo for industrial development and management.

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12. In contrast to the militants, the moderates often find themselves in sympathy with Soviet policy formulations, both because some are schooled in Soviet socialist traditions, and because they believe Soviet objections generally conform to Vietnamese national interests. However, the moderate leaders have proved capable of opposing and criticizing Soviet policy on occasion.

#### Past Rivalry

13. The moderates under Pham Van Dong found their position considerably eroded by the end of 1956 when Ngo Dinh Diem refused to allow the elections for reunification to be held in South Vietnam as provided in the 1954 Geneva agreements. Their position was further undercut during the next two years when it became clear that Diem was growing stronger and would not be brought down by political action or by small terrorist actions. At this point the more militant elements rallied around a relative newcomer to the Hanoi scene, former Viet Cong Commander Le Duan.

14. Le Duan reportedly submitted a resolution to the North Vietnamese Central Committee not long after he arrived in Hanoi urging the initiation of a guerrilla war in South Vietnam to overthrow Diem. Riding this war thesis, the militants began to assume more and more authority and power within the party. The moderates appear to have gone along with the opening of a large-scale insurgent struggle in South Vietnam, presumably because they felt there was no real alternative if control of the south was to be gained.

15. During this period, Khrushchev and Mao apparently took radically divergent views toward the Viet Cong war. Khrushchev advised Hanoi to concentrate on building North Vietnam's economy rather than engaging in a war that could lead to a direct confrontation with the US. Mao, on the other hand, fully approved of Hanoi seeking a military victory by guerrilla warfare.

16. Although both the militants and moderates in the DRV leadership have always appeared united in

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their willingness to wage armed revolution in South Vietnam, there appear to have been differences of opinion at various times over the timing and tempo of the insurgency. In late 1962 and early 1963, for example, when the first widespread use of air power had temporarily knocked the Viet Cong off balance, there apparently was a heated debate within the party over the proper Viet Cong strategy. The moderates appear to have suggested that the Viet Cong concentrate for the immediate future on conserving their military bases and resources. However, the militant view that a more vigorous effort should be made to bolster the Viet Cong strength prevailed, and a step-up in materiel and manpower for the insurgents took place.

#### The Sino-Soviet Dispute

17. In mid-1963, the militants began spearheading a drive to put Hanoi firmly on record against Moscow in the Sino-Soviet dispute. Le Duan, for example, wrote and spoke extensively on the dangers of "modern revisionism" not only to the North Vietnamese party, but also to the whole international Communist movement. The militants also vocally backed Peking in opposing the partial nuclear test ban treaty. It appears that their pressure on these issues stemmed mainly from concern that Soviet tactics of a limited detente with the US would impair Hanoi's chances of conducting a successful armed revolution in South Vietnam.

18. The militant leaders were disillusioned with Moscow because of the Soviet failure to provide strong propaganda and political support for the Vietnamese Communists in the war. Although the moderates probably shared these views, they apparently hoped that Moscow could eventually be persuaded to give more effective backing on the war and were thus against an open political alignment with the Chinese. The Chinese in May 1963 sought to put additional pressure on the North Vietnamese by sending Liu Shao-chi to Hanoi where he insisted that the North Vietnamese drop their equivocation on the dispute.

19. Tugging and pulling within the party over how far the DRV should go in supporting Peking apparently reached a peak at the Ninth Central Committee

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Plenum held in December 1963. The North Vietnamese hinted that there had been considerable difficulty in reaching a consensus at the gathering, reporting that the discussions of the "extremely important" problems at issue had gone on for ten days. The final resolution of the plenum indicated that the militants had failed to push the party as far as they had wished. They were forced to accept a compromise declaration which, although it condemned "modern revisionism" as the main danger to the international Communist movement, drew a distinction between the "Tito revisionists" who were considered beyond the pale and others within the Communist movement--by implication the Soviet leaders--who had committed errors but could still be saved.

20. It was evident from the resolution that the official policy in Hanoi was still to work for Soviet support, mainly in the hope that the leaders in the Kremlin would become more sympathetic to the insurgency in South Vietnam. The compromise worked out at the plenum apparently was highly unsatisfactory to the militant group. In February 1964, the party theoretical journal carried Le Duan's address to the plenum in which he offered a lengthy explanation of his "own views," a solid presentation of the militant viewpoint.

21. After this parting shot at his moderate colleagues, Le Duan largely refrained from further public attacks on the Soviet position. Throughout 1964, however, articles by such second echelon members of the militant faction as Vu Tuan, the editor of Hoc Tap, and Hoang Tung, the editor of Nhan Dan, continued to attack Soviet policy and support Chinese positions.

22. By late spring of 1964, Khrushchev's lackadaisical support for the Viet Cong and his continuing overtures toward the US had even begun to draw criticism from some of the moderate members of the DRV Politburo. Both Pham Hung and Vo Nguyen Giap, who had been most reticent in taking a public position critical of Moscow, authored articles in the spring which were implicitly critical of Soviet policy. The low point in relations between Moscow and Hanoi was probably reached in the Tonkin Gulf crisis,

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in August when the Soviets reacted with considerable caution to the US bombing of the DRV.

#### Improvement in Soviet-DRV Relations

23. Khrushchev's fall in October 1964 offered the North Vietnamese a chance to take a new sounding of Moscow's views on Vietnam. Pham Van Dong visited the new Soviet leaders in November, and apparently returned home with some hope that stronger Soviet political and military backing on the war might now be forthcoming. This expectation apparently resulted in a Hanoi decision to dampen down the polemics against Moscow in the DRV press. Following the premier's return, an article blasting the "revisionists" was removed from the November issue of the party journal and replaced by an innocuous piece on the Soviet revolutionary anniversary. Subsequently, commentary critical of Moscow's policies was almost entirely eliminated from DRV propaganda.

24. The North Vietnamese knew that the growing threat of sustained US air attacks could only be countered effectively by sophisticated military equipment, of which they had little. Some was available from the Chinese Communists, but Moscow would have to be the prime source. Acquisition of such equipment was apparently the major issue raised by the North Vietnamese during Soviet Premier Kosygin's visit to Hanoi in February of 1965, and Kosygin probably promised them some.

#### Muting of Factional Interplay

25. The omission of polemic attacks on Moscow in DRV propaganda, and the warning of North Vietnamese - Soviet relations, once again demonstrated the willingness of the party leaders to tack about together, regardless of their personal proclivities, in a clear case of national interest. It was Le Duan, in fact, who headed the delegation which visited Moscow in April 1965 to firm up agreements on military assistance. There is some evidence that the mission spent several days in Peking on its way home, attempting to refute Chinese objections to a large input of Soviet assistance to North Vietnam.

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26. Peking's action in delaying the arrival of Soviet arms both before and after Le Duan's visit, apparently antagonized most of the militant faction in the DRV. This and the serious military threat to the DRV appears to have temporarily muted factionalism over the Sino-Soviet dispute in the Hanoi party. Since his return from Moscow, Le Duan has continued to discuss the Sino-Soviet dispute with foreign Communist delegations visiting Hanoi. The information on these discussions which has leaked out suggests that he is supporting Hanoi's current line in the dispute.

27. Two other militant Politburo members who also appear within the last few months to have accepted the new line are Hoang Van Hoan, former ambassador to China, and Le Duc Tho, the party organization expert. Hoan, always one of the most outspoken admirers of the Chinese within the DRV party, led a National Assembly delegation to the USSR, Mongolia, North Korea, and Communist China in June 1965. The purpose of the visit, according to Hanoi, was to express the DRV's appreciation for the aid of these countries.

28. Le Duc Tho is probably one of the most important men in the North Vietnamese party. As head of the Organization Department he is in a key position to influence party policies and promotions. He led the party delegation which visited several East European countries and France last summer. The purpose of this junket was to promote new support for the Vietnamese Communist stand on the war. Tho was dealing for the most part with Communist parties who are cool toward the Chinese, and was in fact the guest of the pro-Soviet French party while in France. Within the DRV, Tho appears to have retained his key posts as head of the Party Organization Department and as a member of the Central Committee Secretariat.

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29. The only prominent militant whose reputation apparently has suffered significantly as a result of Hanoi's move toward Moscow is Nguyen Chi Thanh. He was even more prominently identified with pro-Chinese binge in Hanoi than was Le Duan. Thanh has not been noted making a public or private appearance since December 1964. His name has not even been mentioned in the North Vietnamese press since February 1965.

30. Nguyen Chi Thanh has had more ups and downs than anyone else on the Politburo. Prior to 1961 he headed the Army Political Directorate, apparently to provide militants a counterbalance to Defense Minister Giap. Thanh was raised to the rank of senior general during this period, making him the only man besides Giap to ever hold this rank in North Vietnam. In 1961, Thanh was suddenly dropped from his post as political commissar and may have lost his military rank as well, apparently because of pressure from the moderate element.

31. Thanh was then given an innocuous position as party chief of rural affairs, but in March 1963, he suddenly re-emerged as a leading spokesman on all major regime policies. Together with Le Duan, he kicked off the drive which took Hanoi off the fence in the Sino-Soviet dispute and into a position of support for Peking. Thanh also authored articles and speeches taking a militant line on virtually every other aspect of policy. In October of 1963 he wrote an article in the party journal which was apparently intended as a basic position paper on the militant's policy prior to the convening of the ninth party plenum.

32. It is possible that Thanh has been assigned some personal role in directing the insurgency in South Vietnam. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] have identified him as present in the South. It seems more likely, however, that he is in political disfavor because of his failure to adjust when the official party stand shifted away from Peking.

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### Possible Neutrals

33. The present positions of Politburo members Truong Chinh and Nguyen Duy Trinh, and alternate Politburo member Tran Quoc Hoan are not clear. Chinh was long considered a leading member of the pro-Chinese hard-line group in Hanoi. In his writings and activities over the past three years, however, he has been taking a more neutral stand. At the Ninth Plenum, for example, he was given the task of recapitulating the debate over the party's position in the Sino-Soviet dispute, and of presenting the formal draft resolution of the meeting. It is unlikely that he would have been chosen to present the consensus had he agreed with Le Duan that the resolution was not strong enough.

34. Nguyen Duy Trinh's position as chairman of the State Planning Commission has not required him to commit himself often in public on foreign policy issues. This is probably the reason for his appointment as foreign minister last April when Hanoi was starting to walk a careful tightrope between Peking and Moscow. His predecessor, Xuan Thuy, was openly pro-Chinese while Trinh was probably acceptable to both powers. Shortly after his appointment as foreign minister, Trinh accompanied the Le Duan mission to Moscow and Peking. Ho Chi Minh has always used the foreign ministerial post in his government as a public symbol of the then current line of the party. Officials holding the post have been changed frequently.

35. Little is known about Tran Quoc Hoan other than the fact that he heads the Ministry of Public Security. His published writings do not reveal his attitude toward policies in dispute between the militants and moderates.

### Increased Moderate Influence

36. Although the militants with the exception of Thanh do not appear to have suffered much personal

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damage in the normalization of relations between Hanoi and Moscow, the policy switch has undoubtedly strengthened the hand of the moderates. What effect this will have on DRV policy toward South Vietnam is not yet clear. The evidence so far, suggests that this will focus leadership attention more on internal North Vietnamese problems.

Since July there have been a series of articles by DRV leaders which have stressed the importance of continuing North Vietnamese economic development in the face of US air attacks. These articles have gone beyond what might be expected in the way of normal admonitions to keep up production. They have placed particularly strong emphasis on the preservation of North Vietnam as "a strong base area" of the revolution. The implication has been that this should be done even at the expense of support for the insurgency in South Vietnam.

38. In September, for example, Truong Chinh pointed out at length the differences between the present duties of people in the North and in the South. The northerners, he argued, have as their primary duty the building of socialism, while the southerners' chief task is to fight a "national, democratic revolution." The tone of the article clearly implied that the Viet Cong cannot expect the northerners to sacrifice everything they have built over the past nine years to support the war in the South. This article and others by Nguyen Duy Trinh and chief of staff Van Tien Dung do not suggest that the DRV is now planning to abandon the war in the South, but rather that it is reluctant to commit itself to any wholesale increase in support. At the same time, however, it is still urging the Viet Cong to keep up the struggle at an intense pace, and continues to infiltrate troops into the South. The stress on continuing DRV development in these articles has even drawn some support from the militant leaders, including Le Duan.

39. The line expressed in these articles is symptomatic of a much more sober view of the war in South Vietnam than the leadership took earlier

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in the year. This may be partially a reflection of the increased influence of the moderate element in Hanoi, but it is no doubt influenced by the sparseness of major Viet Cong military successes in South Vietnam during the last few months.

#### The Role of the Military

40. The moderates probably draw some support from within the DRV military establishment. Defense Minister Giap and his staff apparently have been carrying on a running debate for several years with the militant wing of the party, and probably also with the Chinese Communists, over the proper tactics to be used by the Viet Cong in the South. Giap and some of his lieutenants are convinced that the best hope for victory in the South lies in the same tactics used in the war against the French--a long struggle largely on the guerrilla warfare level. The main object in Giap's view is to wear down the enemy's will to fight rather than to inflict complete military defeat upon him. Giap seeks to bring the enemy to the negotiating table in as poor a situation as possible, but this need not require his total defeat.

41. An unsigned article in the September issue of the Hanoi journal "Current Events" summed up the moderates' advice to the Viet Cong. "To be successful in people's warfare...we must have the guts to fight for five, ten, or twenty years, and not to fight and win fast." The article warned that "we cannot think of deploying our troops and planning our military operations to strike one powerful blow to decide defeat or victory quickly."

42. The militants on the other hand appear to have argued against opening negotiations until they are certain that the enemy has been completely defeated and Hanoi can dictate the terms of the final settlement. In this they draw on the argumentation and experience of the Chinese.

43. The differences between the two views are apparently based in large part on a differing interpretation of the actual balance of military

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strength in South Vietnam. Giap and the moderates are inclined to a more conservative estimate, while the militants and the Chinese believe the Vietnamese Communists are underestimating their current potential.

44. The foremost exponent of the militant position within the DRV military establishment is the deputy chief of staff, General Hoang Van Thai. His pro-Chinese bias undoubtedly comes from his long association with the Chinese Communists. He was one of the founding members of the Vietnam-China Friendship Association, and reportedly was at one time a member of the Chinese Communist party.

#### Strategy on the War

45. The apparent increase in the influence of the moderate element of the leadership has been accompanied by a greater emphasis in the North Vietnamese press on the possibility of a political solution of the war. Premier Pham Van Dong has taken the lead for the regime in talking about Hanoi's terms for ending the conflict, although he had in fact warned against opening negotiations in a speech in October, when he implied that the resulting lull in the fighting would be mainly to the advantage of the anti-Communist forces. Thus far, however, Pham has not made any significant move toward offering terms acceptable to the US. It is probable, in fact, that even the moderates presently do not feel the situation in South Vietnam is favorable for starting talks on the war. However, their continued references to the possibility of an eventual negotiated settlement are a considerable step away from the Chinese Communist position that there should be no talks on any terms, and that the war must be carried through to a complete Communist military victory.

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# *Memorandum*

## **THE MILITANT AND MODERATE ELEMENTS IN THE NORTH VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST PARTY**

1 December 1965

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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